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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 5767
INFO RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE
RUEHGG/UN SECURITY COUNCIL COLLECTIVE
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 0187
RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA 4476
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 3758
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 7283
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 4845
RUEHCI/AMCONSUL CALCUTTA 1056
RUEHCN/AMCONSUL CHENGDU 1055
RUDKIA/AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI 0869
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 RANGOON 000199

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STATE FOR EAP/MLS; PACOM FOR FPA

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PINS](#) [PREF](#) [PREL](#) [BM](#)

SUBJECT: BURMA: PRECARIOUS PEACE IN KAREN STATE

REF: A. CHIANG MAI 35

[1](#)B. CHIANG MAI 22

[1](#)C. 06 RANGOON 1828

[1](#)D. 06 RANGOON 1767

[1](#)E. 06 RANGOON 1536

[1](#)F. 06 RANGOON 1065

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Classified By: Poloff Dean Tidwell for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: Confusion continues to surround the reported cease-fire agreement between the SPDC and a breakaway faction of the KNU. Unlike earlier cease-fire agreements between the regime and other armed ethnic groups, the latest deal does not require the Karen faction to surrender their arms for peace. The regime continues to allow Karen peacemakers to travel back and forth across the Thai border to convince others to join them inside Burma. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (C) Following January peace talks in Rangoon with Chief of Military Security Affairs (MSA), Major General Ye Myint, the former head of the Karen National Liberation Army's (KNLA) 7th Brigade, Major General Htay Maung, led his supporters to Hto Kaw Koe, a new settlement site provided by the regime in Karen State. The Burmese media highlighted the Karen group's February 11 welcome ceremony.

A CEASE-FIRE WITH A TWIST

[1](#)3. (C) It is still unclear whether Htay Maung and the SPDC signed a written agreement, or just reached an oral agreement similar to the one made with the late General Bo Mya in 2004. The agreement significantly differs from those the regime reached with seventeen other insurgent groups in the 1990s because it does not require the Karen group to surrender any weapons. In its media, the regime calls the latest ceremony a "victory for peace."

[1](#)4. (C) Rangoon-based Karen contacts Drs. Simon Tha and

Rebecca Tin (PROTECT) described the behind-the-scenes drama just before the welcome ceremony. Local Burmese officers wanted the returning Karen soldiers to set aside their weapons for the welcome ceremony, but Ye Myint overruled them, explaining that this was not the usual surrender of "arms for peace." The Burmese officers then requested that the Karen unload their weapons before the ceremony, but Ye Myint again vetoed the idea. The Karen soldiers participated in the ceremony in full battle gear while carrying their arms, including RPGs and mortars.

HTAY MAUNG'S SHUTTLE DIPLOMACY

15. (C) According to Dr. Simon, only 178 Karen attended the welcome ceremony on February 11. Since then, he said, Karen returnees had increased to 321. Exile media reports claim as many as 70 more soldiers have left the 7th Brigade since February 11 to join Htay Maung. Dr. Simon claimed that other Karen also want to join Htay Maung's group, but under its new commander, Brigadier General Johnny, the 7th Brigade has planted landmines and deployed troops to block access routes. The families of many of the returning Karen fighters live in Bae Klaw (Mae La) refugee camp in Thailand; the Karen National Union (KNU) has reportedly forbidden the refugees to leave the camps to return to Burma.

16. (C) During the peace talks, we were told that Htay Maung demanded the Burmese Army withdraw from certain areas of Karen State (ref F). According to Dr. Simon, the Burmese Army immediately complied. However, when newly appointed 7th Brigade commander Johnny threatened to cut off Htay Maung's group from access to the Thai border, Htay Maung requested that the Burmese Army return to keep a travel corridor open. In an unusual move, the regime now permits Htay Maung and Ler Mu, his son-in-law and deputy, to shuttle back and forth

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between Hto Kaw Koe and their base on the Thai border at Maw Pah Thoo, presumably to try to convince additional Karen fighters to join their peace group. Dr. Rebecca also said that when schools in Bae Klaw camp close in March, more families of the returned soldiers might try to join the group inside Burma.

HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE

17. (C) According to Dr. Rebecca, Htay Maung sought the right for NGOs to assist his group to establish itself at Hto Kaw Koe. During the negotiations in Rangoon, Ye Myint granted Htay Maung's request to attend services at the local Seventh-day Adventist Church, where Htay Maung reportedly asked the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) to assist his group when they moved back to Burma. Teddy Din, Director of ADRA Myanmar, told us he has already traveled to Hpa-an to meet Karen State leaders who want ADRA to expand its activities to their region. ADRA has since delivered clothing to the new returnees. Dr. Simon's Karen Development Committee also plans to provide medical assistance to the returnees. If true, the New Mon State Party and other cease-fire groups might also demand that the regime allow INGOs to resume work in their territories. The regime forced INGOs Medecins Sans Frontieres France and the ICRC to stop their activities in Mon State in 2006.

THE HAND THAT ROCKED THE CRADLE

18. (C) According to Dr. Simon, Htay Maung and the KNU leadership never sat down to communicate their differences face-to-face, but instead aired their grievances against each other through international media. Htay Maung complained to Dr. Simon that Bo Mya's second son, Col. Ner Dah, initiated the recent peace discussions with the regime, but at the last moment, he and Brigadier General Johnny backed out (refs C & E). Htay Maung, who is known to be indecisive, then became unusually courageous and decided to make peace. Dr. Simon claimed that the KNU leaders and Htay Maung both jostle for

the support of the late Bo Mya's wife (ref A). In the end, she committed her support to the organization her husband founded -- the KNU -- and told her sons not to join Htay Maung's Peace Council. Dr. Simon stated that Ner Dah abandoned Htay Maung at the last minute, out of a mixture of respect for his mother and a deep-rooted mistrust of the Burmese regime.

A CONVOLUTED PATH TO PEACE

¶9. (C) Dr. Simon also told us that DKBA delegates to Burma's National Convention were called away on urgent business in late December (ref D) as part of secret peace negotiations. Convinced that KNLA commander Nay Kaw, eldest son of Bo Mya, supported a peace deal, the SPDC ordered the DKBA to withdraw its troops from General Bo Mya's former redoubt at Maner Plaw and turn the base over to him. When it appeared that other troops, still loyal to the KNU, might occupy it, the Burmese Army rushed its own soldiers to Maner Plaw to hold it. When Nay Kaw's battalion finally arrived, they handed it over. Nay Kaw then backed out of Htay Maung's peace deal, but continued to occupy Maner Plaw. Through this SPDC miscalculation, forces loyal to the KNU now control Maner Plaw for the first time since the Burmese Army overran it a decade ago.

¶10. (C) COMMENT: These latest events are part of a chain reaction of political and military changes triggered by Bo Mya's death. We expect most Karen soldiers and families will probably wait to see how well the SPDC treats Htay Maung and his followers before deciding whether to join the peace group or remain with the KNU. Nevertheless, the Burmese regime's success at driving another wedge between the KNLA and the KNU was a major propaganda victory, even if it has not yet

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succeeded in its larger plan to woo back a majority of Karen soldiers. Should most Karen soldiers later opt to join Htay Maung and settle in Burma, the KNU central committee would become not only leaders without a country, but also without an army. END COMMENT.
VILLAROSA